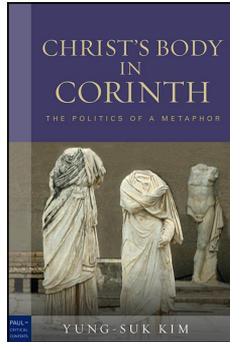


# ○ REVIEW OF YUNG SUK KIM, *CHRIST'S BODY IN CORINTH: THE POLITICS OF A METAPHOR*

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In his introduction Kim lays out his concern clearly, stating that “to claim Christ as a boundary-marker [is] an arrogant and exclusive claim.” This position is self-admittedly based on Kim’s personal experience as a “border” person who desires a community that is all-encompassing rather than excluding. Kim rejects as both non-Corinthian and as presently destructive the understanding of “body of Christ” as a unifier of identity, stating that this kind of control over belongingness may lead to Holocaust, homophobia, and racism. Beginning with this rhetorically inflammatory language, in the following chapters he examines whether Paul’s “body of Christ” language in 1 Corinthians may be interpreted as a metaphor for a “holistic religious and interreligious, intercultural” community. Whatever else may be said of this slender volume (142 pages all inclusive), it is narrowly focused, and clear in its intent.

Clarity of intent does not necessarily result in strength of position, however: on multiple occasions a personal desire for diversity is stated or implied as the sole grounds for a theological or argumentative choice. For example, Kim doubts that Paul would support “love patriarchalism,” but gives no reason for this doubt; he makes clear that his concern is with the “potential for any conception of community to exclude others.” With admirable clarity, Kim states: “Inevitably, when ‘in Christ’ is read as a boundary marker, it contributes to a narrow or an exclusive vision of the community that separates Christians from non-Christians.” In regard to the “destruction of the flesh” passage (1 Cor. 5), Conzelmann’s wrathful excommunication interpretation is judged as totally unacceptable: “unity achieved through the expulsion of members” writes Kim, “is a forced unity, as practiced by the Roman world, and therefore *cannot* have been Paul’s meaning.” Kim’s presentation throughout is so highly ideological in nature that, despite his clear goal, his argumentation fails to convince.

Kim does examine a number of scholars’ arguments within his presentation: Margaret Mitchell, Jerome Neyrey, and Mary Douglas are reviewed alongside Käsemann, Jewett, and James Dunn. Derrida is frequently referenced, and appears to carry far more weight with Kim than do any of

the sociologists, historians, or theologians. Kim's breadth of reference is not so much the problem, as is his depth of examination and argumentation. The examinations are all too brief, so that his sometimes quite complex interlocutors appear more as simple foils. Perhaps this depth would be more evident, had the volume been larger: there is simply not enough space available for Kim to sufficiently present the arguments against his own position.

Throughout his work, Kim repeatedly claims that we should not view "body of Christ" as boundaried, yet he also repeatedly refers to "community," leaving the reader uncertain as to what community it might be that has no boundaries around it. For example, he argues that the "issues and conflicts" dealt with in 1 Corinthians are instances of people failing to live out the "Christic body"; however, he immediately goes on to say that these are issues of conflict "within the community." If this community is not defined by adherence to doctrine or practice, in what sense may it be called a community? If "in Christ" does not define an existence within some boundaried community, on what basis does Paul choose the term *in* Christ? And if "in Christ" is somehow a function of life engaged in by those who might reject any claim to the Christian community's exclusivity, on what basis does Paul term this condition as being in *Christ*?

I will conclude with some miscellaneous observations on this work. Kim has included a number of photographs, but their connection to his argument is often not clear. Had this book been a great deal longer or more broadly-focused, the inclusion of the photographs would not be problematic; as it is, they are a bit distracting. The first end-note comments directly on the phrase *soma christou*, noting "its meaning involves complexities due to its genitive construction. Is it subjective or objective?" Given the fact that *soma* is not a "verbal noun," *christou* can be neither objective nor subjective; such a statement at the very beginning of Kim's argument weakens his position in appearance, if not in reality. Kim's goal is to be applauded, in that he desires a "community that is struggling toward liberation and justice for all." His presentation is substantially weakened by a presupposition that this goal is a sufficient control for interpretation of the text at hand.